



33 years of Liberal Democracy in Sutton

September 2019

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BENHILL AVENUE

Preface



Lord Graham Topo CBE
Sutton Liberal/Liberal Democrat Group
Leader 1974-99

It's fair to say that the Liberal Democrats in the London Borough of Sutton know something about winning elections! In the last three decades we've won all nine 'all out' council elections – five of them with over 80 per cent of the council seats.

But winning has always been only the means to the end, not the end in itself. Yes, of course, to keep winning we must run a 'good council' – nobody wants to vote for a 'bad council'! But any political party can, and sometimes does, run a 'good council'!

We want to win, not just because we're better than the other lot, but because we're Liberal Democrats and we want to show people what a good Liberal Democrat government looks like in action, not just in words.

Our 'end' is a truly Liberal society; our means is a good Liberal Democrat council. Sutton has made a good start over the last 33 years. We look forward now to the next 33 years!



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A record of action. A promise of more

Where to begin? We have been running the Council in Sutton since 1986. That's 33 years putting Liberal and Liberal Democrat values into practice and showing our residents what government based on our values can look like. That's quite special.

Some of our councillors (like Jake Short who helped put this booklet together – thanks Jake!) were born in the borough after 1986. They've only ever lived in Liberal Democrat Sutton. They were born here, went to school here and now want to give back to their own communities and make a difference.

There are so many people to thank and so much I could talk about – far too much for this short booklet. The acknowledgements at the end try and do justice to the scale of the number of people involved. People who worked so hard and with such determination to put us in a position where we could start winning elections and then kept going so we could carry on winning.

People like another Ruth – Ruth Shaw – who helped to form the Sutton and Cheam Young Liberals in 1950, who was the first Liberal elected to the Sutton and Cheam Metropolitan Borough Council in 1961, who led

the party to increase the number of councillors and become the main opposition to the Conservatives by 1964, who was elected in 1973 as one of the two Liberals on the Greater London Council until 1977 and then elected to Sutton Council in 1986 where she remained until her retirement in 2002. She was made an honorary alderman of the borough and, now in her nineties, continues to take an interest in local politics.

It's great to win elections – it's exhilarating. We fight every election campaign as if it's our first and we fight hard. We don't go out to defend, we go out to win.

But it's the hard work that comes afterwards that counts. As Liberal Democrats, we don't have a core group of voters who have grown up in households where everyone has always voted in a certain way and it's taken for granted. We have to show people what Liberal Democrat values look like in practice and we have to keep showing them, year in and year out. We don't do things to people or in spite of people – we take people with us, encourage them to get involved, listen to their concerns and work with them to shape our policies and our decisions.

Because this is our borough, the place where we have chosen to live and work and bring up a family. We are all invested in this place and we want everyone to have the opportunity to thrive and lead happy, healthy lives.

Our history is important – but we look to the future and continually challenge each other. We are never complacent and we never take our residents for granted. We learn from our mistakes, we have the courage to change our minds and we continue to come up with new ideas and new solutions to the many challenges we face.

The articles in this booklet give you a taste of who we are and what we want to achieve. What drives us and the values we hold most dear. We are proud of what we have done – and determined to do so much more. We are proud to have the lowest level of crime in London, proud to have some of the best schools in the country, proud of our green credentials. But we also recognise the scale of present and future challenges – climate change, the mental health of our young people, the new skills needed for the jobs of the future.

It is our responsibility to face up to those challenges, to help provide answers and to work with our residents to create a fairer, more inclusive and more Liberal world. A world where the power to effect change lies, not in our institutions and our established hierarchies, but in the hands of the people who live in our communities.



Councillor Ruth Dombey OBE
Leader of Sutton Council

A council that represents Sutton

In 2019 we have 33 Liberal Democrat councillors, of whom 13 are women, two have disabilities, nine are under the age of 35 and our ethnicity ranges from Persian to Polish, Asian to Latin American, British and Irish.

I am particularly proud that of those 13 women, nine hold positions of special responsibility and include the Leader, Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Resources. Six of our youngest councillors are either chairs or vice-chairs of council committees.

Both our members with disabilities have been either Mayor or Deputy Mayor.

We did not achieve this diversity by design, but neither was it entirely by chance. It has been achieved through ensuring an open and welcoming culture within our group. Opinions and input are truly valued whether coming from new members or long-standing ones; from the Leader or our youngest member. There is a delight in the range of experience of our council group, and it contributes towards making our decisions more robust and relevant to our residents.

When I became a councillor, some years ago, having just turned 40, I was one of the 'youngsters' in a group with an average age of 65. That was a great antidote to the gravitas of reaching that milestone at the time. I was also a complete novice in respect of politics and local government. But still my input was taken seriously; my professional background and life experience seen as an asset, and I was quickly encouraged to take on key roles and responsibilities.

I see that same approach with all our members and ensure I adopt it myself. In fact so keen are we to harness the fresh ideas of our younger members that we can sometimes overburden them, when they are trying to balance full time employment or starting a family.

Our committee system (as opposed to a traditional cabinet/scrutiny model) allows greater participation from all members into policy-making and key decisions. It is also a less politically confrontational model, which I think assists our appeal to women.

When I became a councillor the council group had a good representation of women, with plenty in senior positions, but the high point came in 2010 when we achieved a 50:50 male/female balance in our council group.

We are lucky to have had a regular refresh of councillors after elections, with new minds bringing ideas and energy and helping us avoid complacency.

The culture at the Council and in our group ensures an environment that celebrates diversity and seeks to develop talent.

But the key is still about being proactive and asking people to get involved. Identifying and asking activists and key members of the community to think about becoming a councillor; suggesting to colleagues roles that they might shine in and encouraging them to step up. I took on roles I might not have considered had I not been asked and fell in love with them. Now I am keen to share my enthusiasm with colleagues so they can take up the baton.



Councillor Jayne McCoy
Deputy Leader of Sutton Council

Local committees: giving power back to the communities we serve

Sutton Council's system of Local Area Committees plays a very important role, transferring local decision-making back to the areas that we as councillors represent. The borough's wards are divided into six Local Area Committees based around the villages and districts that make up our borough. These are: North Cheam and Worcester Park; Sutton South, Cheam and Belmont; Sutton Local; St Helier, The Wrythe and Wandle Valley; Carshalton and Clockhouse; and Beddington and Wallington.

One key element of our local committees is the important role that recognised community representatives play. These representatives can be residents' associations, local tenants' associations, traders, heritage groups, local friends' groups or charities. They get a formal seat at the table to take part in discussions about their area. While decisions are ultimately made by councillors, community groups value the inclusivity that Sutton's local committees bring.

A major priority for two of our local committees following the 2018 election was to secure funding for the restoration of a Victorian drinking fountain in The Wrythe ward. The fountain is a fine example of the civic philanthropy of the time and is one of the most prominent heritage structures in the ward, but had been sadly neglected.

As the fountain stands on the boundary between The Wrythe and Carshalton Central wards, their respective local committees agreed to fund the project jointly. This ensured the successful and cost-effective restoration of an important local landmark. Local community groups were also heavily involved in the process, providing historical information, suggesting ideas to further improve the project and giving feedback on the restoration work.

The result was even better than had been expected: the stonework was cleaned, replica taps were installed and the bowls were sealed to prevent them from filling up with rainwater.

Signs were put up to tell residents about the story of the fountain and its place in local history, helping to foster a greater understanding of, and sense of pride in, the area and what it used to be like.

This is a small but important example of how councillors can make a real difference in their wards, even at a time of limited resources. It also highlights the work that local committees excel at – localised projects that elevate and improve the communities we serve.



Before the project



Councillor Jake Short



After the project



Councillor Sam Weatherlake

Delivering on the green agenda, not just talking about it

Sutton is one of the leafiest boroughs in London but away from the physical amenities of the borough, the action taken by successive Liberal Democrat councillors in Sutton over the last three decades have given us a well-earned reputation for our green credentials.

In the early 2000s, we helped pioneer the award-winning Beddington Zero Energy Development (BedZed) as the first construction project where a local authority sold land at below market value to make sustainable development economically viable.

Designed to create zero carbon emissions, the iconic BedZed village was the first large-scale community to do so and today continues to be an inspiration for zero-carbon homes worldwide. And out of the 82 properties, one-third are being rented out to tenants nominated by the council!

In 2011, and after extensive restoration works in close collaboration with the Wandle Trust, the Environment Agency and local community groups, the 11 miles long River Wandle, which passes through south London to join the Thames, was included in a list of the ten most-improved rivers in England and Wales released by the Environment Agency. This was an impressive achievement considering that the river was heavily industrialised in the 17th and 18th century and even officially declared a sewer in the 1960s.

Despite the savage cuts to local government and the dire financial outlook, our ambition to be London's most sustainable borough has not wavered and was still front and centre in our 2018 local election manifesto.

Since our successful election, we've passed a council motion and started the process of removing all single-use plastics from council operations and contracts. We've also planted over 2,000 trees across the borough since last year and, for the first time ever, achieved a recycling rate of over 50 per cent, two years ahead of schedule. This massive increase of 13.5 per cent in recycling in one year now ranks us in the top three best recycling boroughs in London and in the top quartile in the UK.

Our challenge moving forward is to increase our recycling rates but more importantly to reduce the overall amount of waste that we produce. And after a decade of preparation, the South London Waste Partnership (SLWP) will this year start sending 95 per cent of their residual household waste to be treated in a cost-effective and environmentally sustainable new state-of-the-art Energy Recovery Facility (ERF) instead of being buried in the ground. The energy generated from the ERF will also produce 26MW of electricity each year – enough to power the facility itself plus 30,000 homes.

The new facility is located right next to an existing landfill site, which will now close. As the landfill cells are filled they will subsequently be capped and restored into high-quality habitats for wildlife. Once the site is fully restored and the habitats established, the landfill site will be incorporated into the Beddington Farmlands, one of the largest continuous green spaces in south London.

We have ambitious plans for Sutton and are ready to tackle some of the immediate challenges we face. We want cleaner air for our residents, healthier streets, to reduce our dependence on cars, to improve transport links and to get more people to walk and cycle. Sutton is already a wonderful place to live. Our environmental sustainability plans will make it even better for generations to come.



Councillor Manuel Abellan
Chair, Environment and Neighbourhood
Committee

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Artist's impression, Passivhaus school, Belmont

“It is said that it’s not how old you are, it’s how you are old”

Helping to overcome loneliness and isolation in our community.

As Liberal Democrats, we believe in enabling people and their communities to play a bigger role in the decisions that affect them so that they can support themselves and each other. As the borough champion for older people, I play an active role in groups like the Wallington Wellbeing Group which offers a wide range of opportunities to meet people, socialise or volunteer.

You can try your hand at art, rediscover your love of knitting or simply drop in for a cup of tea and a chat at one of many coffee or social clubs near you. Older people and adults with a learning disability need access to information and advice about how to stay healthy, active and safe, as well as where local clubs and groups meet so they can socialise, widen their circle of friends and avoid isolation. Our aim is to provide information about group and leisure activities for adults living in Sutton.

We want to develop and promote community-led activities that support and enable as many people as possible to stay healthy and actively involved in their communities for longer so that:

- their wellbeing is improved
- they have better access to information and advice
- they have more social connections and better support networks
- the community as a whole is strengthened and people are better able to support each other
- to help combat loneliness and isolation.

Twice a year we organise a wellbeing day where more than 40 groups and organisations exhibit and share information about their activities and encourage people to take part. More than 400 elderly people attend these events, connect with their communities and enjoy themselves.

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Councillor Nali Patel
Sutton Old People Champion

We are Sutton Central Ward, London Borough of Sutton

We are proud custodians of the liberal vision in a ward that has benefitted from 45 years of uninterrupted 'liberalism'. Despite the occasional boundary change, we succeed and protect the values and hard work of our predecessors and guard their visions and endeavour with pride and reverence. Nevertheless, we are ambitious and forward thinking.

We represent a ward with many social and technical challenges, including: regeneration, transport links, commercial town centre pressures, heritage and the protection of established communities.

We are strong believers of community engagement and participation. We have one in the largest estates out of the 18 wards in our borough, alongside other sizeable estates.

Our mission? To facilitate, protect and encourage residents to contribute to the vision of our town centre, their community and our ward.

Our ambition? For the local community to help shape and design our urban landscape for future generations and to create homes and communities for tomorrow.

This has come in the form of resident associations, steering groups and local committees.

We work tirelessly to engage with our residents and give them the tools and support to make independent decisions about their lives.

Unlike some parties, we are not afraid to engage and to be challenged. As a consequence, residents appreciate our facilitation, our personal commitment and our candid approach.

Whatever their personal political views, when good councillors turn up and knock on their door, residents respond favourably and enthusiastically and recognise our hard work and dedication to our community.

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Councillors David Bartolucci, Ali Mirhashem and Richard Clare

Transport campaigning

In 2011 the rail company Thameslink threatened to stop cross-London train services on the Thameslink loop line via Blackfriars station. This would have ended our ability to take a direct train from Sutton to one of our fellow Liberal Democrat boroughs, such as St Albans or Bedford. It would have impacted on a range of south London boroughs, so Sutton led a cross-borough, cross-party campaign across south London. This culminated in a day of action on 18 July 2012 followed by a public meeting on 19 July in Sutton involving all the would-be franchisees for the Thameslink line, which was then up for renegotiation.

The day of action truly set off a chain reaction and was an excellent example of cooperation in practice. We arranged for campaigners from right along the route to travel on the line with the aim of meeting up at Blackfriars at the same time for a public demonstration. I gave interviews on BBC Radio London, and postcards were given out at each station boarded and on the trains. The day of action received wide publicity, and with the support of local MPs and GLA members, including at the public meeting, we ultimately succeeded in our aim of continuing cross-London services on the loop line.

Because of this success, and because this coincided with our desire to bring Tramlink to Sutton (extending it from

Merton and Croydon), sustainable transport became the keynote strategy for the time I was Environment and Neighbourhood Committee Chair. We worked tirelessly with stakeholders and community groups to work out our key demands to take to government, the rail companies, the Mayor of London and Transport for London. Sutton is unique in that it does not have the London Underground, Overground nor Tramlink, and only the far northern corner is scheduled to benefit from Crossrail 2. Our bus services are poor in comparison to the rest of London outside the main district centres, and we were keen that not only should we be better served now, but that any new economic or housing development should be accompanied by new or improved public transport.

The Council regularly holds meetings of its Public Transport Liaison Group involving councillors, TfL officials, transport providers and local stakeholder groups. The views of this group helped inform our thinking in the development of the Sustainable Transport Strategy (STS) and it continues to inform our views on transport matters as they arise. We have received regular updates on progress with bringing the tram to Sutton and we are confident that it will not be long before the first tram comes into service in a few years time.

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The STS is now incorporated in both our planning policy and environmental policy. It has led to a range of other related policies such as our Cycling Strategy and our Electric Vehicles (ULEV) Charging Policy which are aimed at keeping Sutton green. More recently we succeeded in bidding to TfL for a demand responsive bus trial – GoSutton. We are the first borough in London to try this service and because it has proved so popular the trial area has been extended.

This has enabled our poorly-served residents to have on-demand access to the innovative service. This will help reduce car use and will be complementary to existing bus services. We also hold the private rail companies to account, for their failed services and continue to demand TfL's London Overground take control of local rail services.

Finally, we are running a bus campaign – Better Buses for Sutton – as the borough is so dependent on its bus services. One of our key requests will be to greatly improve bus services at school start and finish times, as Sutton officially has some of the best secondary schools in the country. We are keen to encourage more people to walk, cycle, take public transport, or share cars, and starting with school parents will help reduce the number of cars on our roads.



Councillor Jill Whitehead
Former Chair, Environment and Neighbourhood Committee

Sutton – the new home for Cancer Centre of Excellence

When I became Leader of Sutton Council, I knew that we were fortunate to have The Royal Marsden Hospital in our borough. What I didn't fully appreciate that right next door, on the same site, was the Institute of Cancer Research (ICR), one of the world's most important cancer research centres with an outstanding record of drug discovery.

Scientists at the ICR were the first to show that DNA damage is the basic cause of cancer and discovered many of the early chemotherapies. Today they discover more new cancer drugs than any other academic organisation in the world and are a world leader in identifying cancer genes and developing precision radiotherapy.

So together with the Royal Marsden, one of the world's leading cancer hospitals, you could argue that the London Cancer Hub already exists and is thriving. But in conversation with both organisations, it soon became apparent that the site itself was proving a barrier with state-of-the-art modern buildings next to portacabins being used for drug discovery and no logical or efficient layout of the estate.

That's where the Council came into its own. Rather than cramming in

more buildings on the existing estate, Sutton Council has helped the ICR and the Marsden develop a fundamental re-think of the whole site. The aim is to deliver a world-class environment for cancer research, diagnosis and treatment and to create the world's leading life-science district – a vibrant community of scientists, doctors and innovative companies – which will deliver real benefits for cancer patients and drive economic growth.

The project is expected to create more than 13,000 new jobs and contribute £1.1 billion each year to the UK economy. The ICR anticipates that the new environment will allow scientists to deliver at least two extra cancer drugs every five years while the Royal Marsden will be able to translate these ground-breaking discoveries through to patients in their clinics.

Sutton Council is leading on the master planning work for the London Cancer Hub. We recognise the massive opportunities this will bring to Sutton in terms of employment, economic growth and better transport links. The ICR works closely with private companies in the discovery and development of new drugs and medical technologies and we want to create the

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Artist's impression of the London Cancer Hub

space for these companies to move on to the site or for companies to be spun out of the ICR's research so that ideas and knowledge can be transferred quickly and effectively.

The 20-year project will be developed in phases so as to minimise disruption to existing research and patient care. The first phase is already nearly complete with a new drug discovery research centre for the ICR, a new Maggie's Centre for the Royal Marsden to provide practical, emotional and social support to people with cancer and their families, and the completion of a new

secondary school on the site with close links to the ICR. Sutton Council had the foresight to buy the land needed for the school from the NHS and then invested another £30 million to buy more land to ensure the whole site is safeguarded for this important project and developed more efficiently.

This is true partnership working. Each of the partners recognises that it can achieve its ambitions more successfully if it works alongside the others, developing joint plans and joint ambitions while still focussing on its own particular area of expertise.

The ICR and the Royal Marsden will be able to enhance and expand their facilities, develop ground-breaking cancer research and treatment, and develop a vibrant workforce of scientists and clinicians with a wide range of career opportunities.

The London Cancer Hub will create jobs, generate revenue and bring about broader changes that will benefit all of the residents living in our borough. It will put Sutton on the map as a centre for cancer research and treatment with a truly global reputation.

It will encourage our residents to develop their skills in the thriving life science sector and enable them to secure well-paid jobs into the future.

Liberal Democrats in Sutton are ambitious for our borough and for our residents. The London Cancer Hub embodies that ambition.

Councillor Ruth Dombey OBE
Leader of Sutton Council



Artist's impression of the London Cancer Hub

Admiral Nurses - helping to tackle dementia

Admiral Nurses are specialist-trained dementia nurses. Sutton is the only London borough to employ four specialist Admiral Nurses. The Sutton-wide service was launched in 2014 and is highly successful. The service supports people living with dementia and their families and carers.

Admiral Nurses enable carers to understand what is happening in their lives and how to react positively to the impact of dementia in a loved one or family member .

Admiral Nurses seek to enable dementia sufferers, wherever possible, to carry on living in their own home, maximising independence. This provides a familiar environment and encourages calmness and a re-assuring continuity.

In Sutton, in just five years, Admiral Nurses have made a huge impact on many hundreds of lives. Sutton has become a role model to other councils.

Here are some comments from residents who have used this valuable service:

“Admiral Nurses give hope and a future to many who experience the life changing impact of dementia.”

“It is so encouraging for us that we have Admiral Nurses working in the community with their unique way of providing support to sufferers and carers, sustainably and successfully.”

“Admiral Nurses are increasingly showing the way forward to address dementia’s impacts and improve the quality of life.”

These Admiral Nurses provide a crucial service in not only making patients’ lives more comfortable and allowing them to live in a familiar environment, but they also help carers and their families going through a difficult time to understand why these changes are happening and how they can learn to cope.



Councillor Annie Moral
Deputy Mayor

Acknowledgements

It would be impossible to list the names of all the thousands of people who have contributed to the success of the Liberal Democrats in Sutton.

Since 1986 we have elected well over 300 councillors with four council leaders (Graham Tope 1986-99, Mike Cooper 1999-2002, Sean Brennan 2002-2012, Ruth Dombey 2012-present).

In 1997 we elected MPs to both the constituencies in the borough (Tom Brake in Carshalton & Wallington and Paul Burstow in Sutton & Cheam). Both Tom and Paul were councillors in the borough and Tom is still one of our MPs. We lost Sutton & Cheam in 2015 but have every intention of getting it back. We campaign jointly with our MPs and PPCs and our integrated campaigning is one of the reasons for our success.

Graham Tope was the MP for Sutton & Cheam 1972-74. He is an active peer in the House of Lords and was also a member on the London Assembly 2000-08 while still a Sutton councillor. He represented the same ward for 40 years until his retirement from the council in 2014.

But as every elected politician knows, it is the army of people working for the party that makes success possible – the ward organisers, ward activists, deliverers, canvassers, bundlers, blue letter envelope writers, local party organisers, data analysts, party chairs, treasurers, secretaries, fundraising and membership secretaries, campaign managers and agents, donors and people who put up posters and stakeboards. People who make jam, sell books, organise social events and raffles – always the raffles!

A special thank you goes to all those people who have never held elected office, never earned a penny in allowances or expenses, never had a moment in the limelight but work tirelessly behind the scenes because they believe in our values. They know that we need to win elections to be able to put those values into practice.

And to the Local Government Association Liberal Democrat Team for encouraging us to tell our story

We owe everyone who has worked so hard to build our success so much and we are truly grateful. Thank you



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